

Message Text

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SUBJ: RABIN: HIS STYLE AND HIS POLICY

SUMMARY: TWIN THREADS OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY AS RABIN PREPARES FOR WASHINGTON VISIT ARE A) CALL FOR RECONVENING GENEVA CONFERENCE IN 1976 WITH ORIGINAL PARTICIPANTS, PROVIDED UNSC DEBATE DOES NOT UNDERCUT EXISTING NEGOTIATING FRAMEWORK, AND B) RELIANCE ON ISRAELI MILITARY STRENGTH IF MIDDLE EAST SITUATION DETERIORATES. RABIN VIEWS SINAI II AS ALREADY BENEFICIAL, POINTING TO STRONG SUPPORT FROM SADAT FOR RECONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE. AT GENEVA HE IS PREPARED TO DEAL WITH JORDANIAN DELEGATION WHICH INCLUDES WEST BANKERS. HE REMAINS DEEPLY SKEPTICAL ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR INTERIM AGREEMENT WITH SYRIA AND FIRM IN HIS REFUSAL TO DEAL WITH PLO. HE BELIEVES THAT BASIC US COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL IS SECURE, THAT ISRAEL CAN RESIST ADMINISTRATION PRESSURES FOR HARD NEW DECISIONS BEFORE ELECTION, AND THAT WORST THAT CAN BEFALL ISRAEL IN THIS REGARD IS SOME CUT IN LEVEL OF US AID IN 1976-77. THIS ASSESSEMENT, TOGETHER WITH DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS (SEPTTEL) LEADS HIM TO CONTINUE TO PREFER SLOW MOVEMENT ON NEGOTIATING FRONT AT LEAST UNTIL 1977. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE WASHINGTON VISIT. RABIN'S WASHINGTON TALKS WILL BE

VIEWS IN ISRAEL AS A FURTHER TEST OF HIS LEADERSHIP IN A NEW PERIOD OF POLITICAL TENSIONS IN U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS. WITH FORUMS OF DISCUSSIONS EXPECTED TO BE ON PROSPECTS FOR RESUMING THE NEGOTIATING MOMENTUM IN AFTERMATH OF JANUARY 12 UNSC DEBATE, RABIN HAS ADOPTED TWO-FOLD APPROACH. ON ONE HAND HE HOLDS OPEN POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS, PARTICULARLY RESUMPTION OF GENEVA CONFERENCE LATER THIS YEAR PROVIDED UNSC DEBATE DOES NOT UNDERCUT EXISTING NEGOTIATING FRAMEWORK. ON OTHER HAND HE HAS PUBLICLY SIGNALED IN RECENT DAYS THAT ISRAEL INTENDS TO PRESERVE ITS MILITARY OPTION IN EVENTUALITY OF SHARP DETERIORATION IN MIDDLE EAST EITHER AS RESULT OF UNSC DEBATE OR FURTHER COLLAPSE OF LEBANON. THIS DUALITY IS CHARACTERISTIC OF ISRAELI APPROACH, ENABLING RABIN TO MAINTAIN BROAD DOMESTIC SUPPORT AS DEFENDER OF NATIONAL INTERESTS AND AT SAME TIME INDICATING TO SUPERPOWERS AND ARAB STATES THAT ISRAEL CANNOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

2. RABIN'S STYLE. BY GENERAL CONSENSUS IN UNCHARISMATIC LEADER, RABIN'S STRONGEST TRAITS REMAIN HIS ANALYTICAL ABILITIES AND STEADFASTNESS OF HIS CONVICTIONS (HIS DETRACTORS SAY HIS RIGIDITY) ON HOW BEST TO COPE WITH SITUATION CONFRONTING ISRAEL. FUNCTIONING WITHOUT "KITCHEN CABINET" OF INFORMAL ADVISORS SUCH AS HAD EXISTED UNDER MEIR, RABIN IS A TRUE LONER. ALTHOUGH NOMINALLY HE COORDINATES ISRAEL'S APPROACH WITH ALLON AND PERES, THEIR POLITICAL RIVALRIES AND POLICY DIFFERENCES (E.G., ON PALESTINIAN QUESTION AND SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES) REINFORCE HIS PREFERENCE FOR TAKING MAJOR DECISIONS ALONE.

3. IN TEMPERAMENT DRY AND ALOOF, RABIN SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY SELF-CONFIDENT SINCE BECOMING PRIME MINISTER IN JUNE 1974. MANY ISRAELIS SAY THAT REAL MEASURE OF HIS LEADERSHIP WILL COME ONLY IN MOMENT OF INTENSE PRESSURE SUCH AS WAR SITUATION OR SHARP POLITICAL CRISIS, AND EXPRESS CONCERN THAT HE MIGHT COLLAPSE AS SOME SAY HE DID BRIEFLY DURING WAITING PERIOD PRECEDING JUNE 1967 WAR. OTHERS NOTE HIS ANGRY THREAT OF RESIGNATION LAST MONTH IN RESPONSE TO CRITICISM BY LABOR ALIGNMENT FACTION OF HIS HANDLING OF SEBASTIA SETTLERS, AND BELIEVE SIMILAR SPONTANEOUS CONFRONTATION COULD ARISE AGAIN. BUT DOMINANT VIEW IS THAT HE HAS TAKEN CHARGE, IS COMFORTABLE IN THE JOB, AND HAS NO INTENTION OF RELINQUISHING IT.

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4. THE POLITICIAN'S ART. PARADOXICALLY, ALTHOUGH RABIN GIVES SPEECHES AND INTERVIEWS AT A RELENTLESS CLIP, MANY LOCAL OBSERVERS PROFESS THEMSELVES UNCERTAIN AS TO WHETHER HE IS HAWK OR DOVE, ABLE TO LEAD OR ONLY TO FOLLOW TRENDS OF PUBLIC OPINION, POSSESSING A VIEW OF A LONG-RANGE SOLUTION OR SIMPLY BUYING TIME. IN PART, THIS IS RESULT OF POLITICIAN'S KNACK OF AVOIDING DIRECT ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS WHEN HE DOES NOT WANT TO REVEAL HIS HAND. BUT IT IS ALSO REFLECTION OF FACT THAT, FOR ALL HIS

ANALYTICAL ACUMENT, RABIN'S APPROACH IS NEITHER CREATIVE
NOR DYNAMIC, BUT RATHER REACTIVE AND DEFENSIVE.

5. FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS. RABIN'S POLICY, FIRMLY ROOTED IN
LABOR PARTY DOCTRINE AND PLATFORMS, ENVISAGES SLOW MOVEMENT
TOWARD NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS IN WHICH ISRAEL WOULD AGREE TO
TERRITORIAL COMPROMISES CONSIDERABLY SHORT OF RETURN TO 1967
BORDERS IN RETURN FOR BINDING ARAB POLITICAL COMMITMENTS TO END
STATE OF WAR AND MOVE TOWARD PEACE. MORE IMMEDIATELY, RABIN'S GOAL
IS TO DEFER HARD NEW DECISIONS ON NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL AFTER US
ELECTION WHILE SHOWING READINESS FOR FURTHER MOVEMENT AND
SHIFTING ONUS FOR DEADLOCK ONTO ARAB STATES. AFTER LENGTHY
PERIOD IN WHICH ISRAEL WAS DISINTERESTED IN REACTIVATING GENEVA
CONFERENCE, RABIN NOW CALLS FOR ITS RECONVENING LATER THIS YEAR
TO COUNTER CURRENT SYRIAN/PLO OFFENSIVE TO SHIFT NEGOTIATING VENUE
TO SECURITY COUNCIL. FIRMLY OPPOSED TO DEALING WITH PLO IN ANY FORM,
RABIN IN LAST WEEK HAS SAID SEVERAL TIMES THAT ISRAEL WOULD SIT DOWN
AT GENEVA WITH JORDANIAN DELEGATION WHICH COULD INCLUDE WEST
BANKERS. HE IS CONVINCED THAT JORDAN REMAINS VIABLE NEGOTIATING
PARTNER FOR RESOLUTION OF PALESTINIAN ISSUE SOMETIME IN FUTURE
PROVIDED NEITHER US NOR ISRAEL CHANGE THEIR POSITIONS ON PLO.
SADAT'S STRONG SUPPORT FOR RECONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE
ALSO HAS ENCOURAGED RABIN THAT HE IS ON RIGHT TRACK, AND THAT
SINAI II INDEED IS PRODUCING TANGIBLE BENEFITS INCLUDING DIVIDING
SYRIA FROM EGYPT.

6. US-ISRAELI RELATIONS. RABIN RECOGNIZES CENTRALITY OF CLOSE
US-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP, AND CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF US
POLITICAL, MILITARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT. AT SAME TIME, HE BELIEVES
THAT HE CAN RIDE OUT POLICY DIFFERENCE WITHOUT LEADING TO RIFT
IN US-ISRAELI RELATIONS. AT MOST, US MIGHT REDUCE AID LEVELS FOR
A CERTAIN PERIOD OF TIME. RABIN SEEMS MORE CONCERNED WITH WHAT
HE PERCEIVES AS WEAKNESS OF AMERICAN POSITION AFTER WATERGATE
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AND VIETNAM THAN WITH NEED TO REVAMP ISRAELI APPROACH. HE DOES NOT
SHARE OUR SENSE OF CONCERN THAT DEADLOCK MIGHT PRECIPITATE NEW
WAR IN TIME LEADING TO AN OIL EMBARGO.

7. CONCLUSION. IN SUM, RABIN REMAINS TOUGH NEGOTIATOR WHO WILL
COME TO WASHINGTON WITH HIS OWN POLITICAL/STRATEGIC CONCEPT AND A
FRAGMENTED HOME FRONT BOTH OF WHICH INCLINE HIM TO MOVE SLOWLY
ON NEGOTIATING FRONT. FROM DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE, IT IS EASIER FOR
HIM TO AVOID HARD NEW DECISIONS ON EITHER GOLAN HEIGHTS OR
WEST BANK. MOREOVER, HE IS CONFIDENT THAT IDF IS AT OR NEAR PEAK
OF ITS STRENGTH. THUS RABIN IS PREPARED FOR EITHER CONTINGENCY--
MEASURED DIPLOMATIC PROGRESS IN ACCORD WITH ISRAELI INTERESTS AND
POSSIBILITIES AS HE SEES THEM, OR SHOWDOWN WITH SYRIA IF
NEGOTIATING MOMENTUM COLLAPSES.
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